

## MINI-GUIDE FOR

# ANTI-OPPRESSION, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY



Every organization has a role in ensuring that equity, inclusion, and accessibility are a reality. All efforts to mitigate intentional and unintentional oppression in community engagement must be taken. Without the recognition and direct addressing of inequity in the community engagement process, organizations perpetuate systemic and structural inequalities, including racism, xenophobia, gender and identity bias, etc. It is imperative that equity and anti-oppression are an essential component of your community engagement process, not just a check-box. This mini-guide acts as a reference tool of resources and information on promoting equity and providing accessible and inclusive services.

## 4.1 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND POWER DYNAMICS

Without a focus on power dynamics, community engagement is inherently unequal. Race, power, injustice, ability, language, immigration status, socio-economic status, identity, and age all play a major role in engagement experiences. Extensive research and a deep understanding of your stakeholders is needed to understand what barriers to participation might occur due to power imbalances both within the community and as a result of the engagement process. Pay close attention to those who have less access to power, and work to identify opportunities in your engagement for stakeholders to influence decisions.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING POWER DYNAMICS

**Challenge your assumptions.** Building competency in equitable engagement requires a learning mindset. Without taking the time to challenge your own and your organization's assumptions about your stakeholders, you risk upholding and perpetuating systems of oppression.

**Understand your positionality.** You are most likely an employee of an agency, organization, or system working in communities. Depending on the reputation of that institution, stakeholders may have immediate distrust that affects long-term relationships and trust-building.

**Attendance-driven results will be exclusionary.** If evaluation of an engagement effort relies only on attendance numbers you may fail to reflect the community. Engagement efforts should evaluate what communities or target audiences were reached and weigh that against attendance numbers. A first step to address this is to identify a targeted outreach and promotion campaign.

### IN THIS SECTION

- 4.1 [Barriers to Participation and Power Dynamics](#)
- 4.2 [Digital and Internet Access Barriers](#)
- 4.3 [Disability Barriers](#)
- 4.4 [Checklist for Anti-Oppression, Inclusion, and Accessibility](#)

# 4

### STAKEHOLDERS AS ADVOCATES OF CHANGE

Find ways to support stakeholders in becoming advocates of the community change desired. Stakeholders who offered their time, insights, and efforts to a community engagement are the best people suited to turn an engagement into action. Provide leadership opportunities and ensure stakeholders continue to be part of the decision-making process.

### TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Use the [Equity and Inclusion Assessment](#) to ensure you are creating an engagement that is equitable, inclusive, and accessible.

**Understand the socio-historical context.** To best serve and engage your stakeholders, you must have cultural competency and knowledge about the inequities faced by your target community. It is important to understand the social, environmental, and structural determinants of inequity in your community. Work to acknowledge the history and experiences of your community in the engagement process.

- Analyze the impact of white culture on the community. Over time, this knowledge will support you in addressing specific needs and desires that help to intervene.
- Be mindful not to reduce complex and varied communities into one stereotype. An engagement targeted at a Spanish-speaking community might have multiple target audiences like Puerto Ricans, new arrivals from Belize, or 3rd generation Americans.

**Build and sustain trust.** Trust between stakeholders and the facilitator is one of the most essential components for building authentic engagements. Create an environment that *exchanges* information rather than *collects* it, shares power, and has clear rules of engagement.

**Create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.** Your choice of location or platform might exclude certain stakeholders. Understand how characteristics of spaces may be exclusionary (e.g., A government building may exclude undocumented immigrants.). Additionally, make your space accessible to those who are differently-abled by choosing venues or platforms with all stakeholders in mind.

**Foster authentic relationships and leadership.** Rarely are community engagements a one-off event, but, rather, they are part of ongoing and continued programming and community development. As such, engagement efforts should focus on continuous relationship development.

- Identify community leaders and organizations, and ask for their insights in the planning process; everything from guidance on when a community might prefer to gather to gaining insights on the community's priorities and needs.
- Foster strategic partnerships with diverse organizations and agencies that have relationships across the whole community.

**Actively listen.** Make space and time to actively listen to stakeholders. While you may be an expert in your field, you may not be an expert of this community and their experiences. Take time to have difficult conversations and discuss concerns, opportunities, and priorities.

**Work towards transparency and accountability.** Facilitators should be transparent with stakeholders about their role, the context of the project and, most significantly, how their input is being used. Any opportunities to share results from the engagement back to the community should be taken.

---

## VULNERABILITY IN VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Asking stakeholders to have their video on in a virtual engagement puts them in a vulnerable position.

It is rare that we see the inside of our stakeholders homes and uncommon to glimpse their personal family dynamics. Many may not want to share what their home looks like, may not have privacy from other family members, or may be uncomfortable with their appearance. Be flexible and empathetic, a stakeholder might have a valid reason for keeping their video off.



---

## ARTS AND CULTURE AS AN EQUITY TOOL

Arts and culture are great strategies to promote inclusion, connection, belonging, identity, and more. Through art-making practices and cultural exchanges, your stakeholders are building relationships with others in their community, becoming more comfortable around each other, and more welcomed to the engagement space. For more on arts and culture, review the [Mini-Guide for Planning Engagements](#).

**Be okay with discomfort.** Allow yourself and your stakeholders to sit and learn from discomfort. This is especially true for those of us who work in communities that have been historically marginalized. As uncomfortable as it can be, it is a critical step towards leading with an anti-racism lens in community engagement.

**Be ready to learn.** Allow yourself to hear everything that stakeholders have to share. Some of the insights explored may be triggering and uncomfortable, but it is necessary in order to understand, challenge our own assumptions, and to build empathy.

**Be vulnerable.** Bring your whole self to the engagement, including your vulnerability. Oppression has a deep-rooted impact on our neighbors and everyday systems, and it is important that everyone comes to the table knowing that vulnerability is a strength in order to build capacity and problem-solve.

**Review the levels of comfort.** When facilitating, check in with your stakeholders and their comfort levels. While you can analyze comfort through body language and level of participation, knowing the *Three Zones of Comfort*, developed by [Daniel Lim](#), can help you understand the most appropriate agenda, and prepare you to pivot in the moment to promote the safest dialogue possible for everyone.

- *Safe zone:* Stakeholders are very familiar with content and are comfortable. Little learning happens in this zone, and stakeholders may not be challenged to learn beyond what they already know.
- *Challenge zone:* Stakeholders' beliefs are challenged, but they still feel safe and included. Most learning outcomes are achieved in the challenge zone.
- *Danger zone:* Stakeholders' worldviews are breaking down. They may feel uprooted and unsafe; therefore, no learning can happen in this zone.

**Remain flexible.** In terms of facilitation, a key consideration for equity is to remain flexible, and understand that the anticipated course of the engagement may shift or pivot. Stakeholders may come to an engagement needing a space to vent. This may delay your agenda, but remain flexible and allow unpredicted discussions to happen in the moment. These conversations could be instrumental for solution-thinking.

**Walk away with the lessons learned, not the specific context.** To honor confidentiality in an engagement, remind yourself and the stakeholders to walk away with the lessons and knowledge they learned, rather than the people, places, or specific circumstances shared in the dialogue. To review best practices for setting ground rules and group norms review the [Mini-Guide for Planning Engagements](#).



---

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

You have probably participated in or witnessed a [land acknowledgment](#). This practice is incorporated into community engagements as a way of acknowledging the Indigenous groups that once occupied the land on which the engagement is taking place. Land acknowledgments are a critical learning tool and a strategy for honoring the socio-historical and cultural context of where we work.

---

## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Take a lesson from the education community and fold culturally responsive practices into your engagement. Being culturally responsive helps stakeholders better connect with your subject matter, and they become more willing to engage. One simple way is to offer an engagement in a language other than English. Another solution could be to share images, text, or examples that reflects the participants in the room. Learn more at [Edutopia](#).

## 4.2 DIGITAL AND INTERNET ACCESS BARRIERS

COVID-19 caused a shift in what we thought possible and reasonable in community engagement. While previously in-person methods were heavily relied on, there are significant benefits for virtual engagements when it comes to time, safety, and access. Those benefits are not without drawbacks. Online engagements can be less effective and barriers of internet access, digital literacy, and infrastructure continue to prohibit participation for all.

Internet access and access to internet-capable devices can be cost prohibitive, and those that are not may not work effectively. You can read more about the digital divide from the [Digital Divide Council](#). Furthering the divide are stark differences in *digital literacy*, an individual's ability to navigate hardware and software. Literacy levels can vary from those who have never used a mouse or trackpad, to those who struggle with Photoshop. Socio-economic status and age play a major role in an individual's digital literacy.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING DIGITAL AND INTERNET ACCESS BARRIERS

**Understand your community's capacity.** To best engage and serve your community, find out their comfort level with digital access and connection capabilities.

- Take time to listen to your community to find out how they connect, their preferred method of connection, and what might support them in connectivity challenges.
- Research broadband access of specific neighborhoods. Check out this great [example](#) from Hester Street.
- Mail or text out a survey. Find out your target community's capacity, interests, and needs.

**Build community capacity alongside engagement.** According to the [United Nations](#), digital literacy and internet access are rights. Work to build community capacity by supporting these efforts.

- Provide internet access to stakeholders. If resources permit, provide them with hotspots, internet concessions, or prepaid SIM cards.
- Work with a partner organization, like the library, to provide internet access and/or internet-capable devices. Provide digital literacy learning opportunities. Work on skill development with stakeholders to strengthen their digital literacy by offering classes, workshops, 1-on-1s, and tutorials.
- Offer time before an engagement to teach stakeholders how to use the platform, or dedicate time in your session to address digital literacy.



### ADDRESSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The digital divide is a national challenge. It will take more than one organization, more than one initiative to bridge the divide.

If you are unable to mitigate barriers to internet access and/or digital literacy, use different methods for engagement. Instead partner with an organization already doing the work (libraries are often a great starting place).

Here is a [list of additional Digital Literacy tools](#) for learners of any age from the New York Public Library or Digital Literacy's [tools and resources](#) to expand your own training.

### CATALOG OF IDEAS

When considering accessible methods of engagement, look to [Part IV - Catalog of Ideas](#) for ways to support your chosen format.

## 4.3 DISABILITY BARRIERS

Stakeholders with disabilities are among the most diverse and vulnerable groups in a community, and engagement efforts must take this into account. [The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 \(ADA\)](#) is a federal civil rights law enacted to prohibit discrimination based on disability by employers, businesses, and public services. Organizations are required by law to make reasonable accommodations, meet the basic requirements of ADA, and are prohibited from discrimination on the basis of disability. Accommodations can be small changes, such as how instruction is delivered and communication occurs, that should not alter the goal of the activity. They are intended to provide the stakeholder with an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from engagement opportunities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “a disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)...”

- **Impairment** in a person’s body structure or function, or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision, or memory loss
- **Activity limitation**, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving
- **Participation restrictions** in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services”

While some disabilities are visible, others, like Diabetes or mental illness, are not, and no two people with the same disability are impacted in quite the same way. Understanding the medical and environmental barriers as you plan an engagement can help make sure your event is accessible to as many stakeholders as possible.

Among the wide array of disabilities one might see in one’s community these are the primary classifications:

- Cognitive
- Communication
- Hearing
- Learning
- Memory
- Mental health
- Physical
- Social
- Vision

For detailed resources on specific disabilities in these categories, see [pages 58 & 59](#).

This is an evolving field, and it is important that the ownership of any classifications or labels is on the person themselves. “Nothing about us without us.” Persons with disabilities know best what they need and how to create engagements that serve them. If developing an engagement to reach a specific disability community, be sure to utilize members of that community in your planning. More resources and better ways to serve this population are constantly shifting and being added to the conversation. **Ask before making assumptions.**

---

### LANGUAGE MATTERS

The terminology used to define or describe disabilities depends on the context in which it’s being used. There is much debate among the disability community around language, as it is personal and always evolving. It’s essential that as a program planner and facilitator you are sensitive to the words you choose.

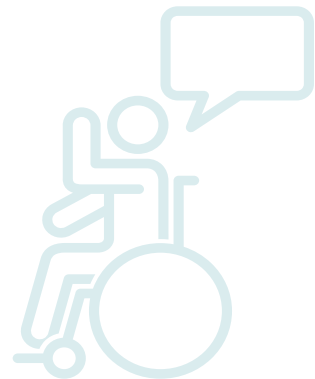
## COMMON BARRIERS

The CDC reminds us that “activities and participation can be made easier or more difficult as a result of environmental factors, such as technology, support and relationships, services, policies, or the beliefs of others.” It is the responsibility of the planning and facilitation team to plan engagements with common barriers in mind to make it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders. Eliminating barriers for some, can make the event more accessible for all.

The [World Health Organization](#) defines barriers as “factors in a person’s environment that, through their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability. These include aspects such as:


- a physical environment that is not accessible,
- lack of relevant assistive technology (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices),
- negative attitudes of people towards disability,
- services, systems, and policies that are either nonexistent or that hinder the involvement of all people with a health condition in all areas of life.”

Those barriers can be categorized as attitudinal, communication, physical, policy-related, programmatic, social, or transportation-related. Often more than one barrier may be present at once. When planning your engagement, use the following chart to help you identify and dissolve barriers to access for your community.



Adapted from [Center for Disease, Control, and Prevention](#)

TYPE OF BARRIER	EXAMPLES OF BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION	BEST PRACTICES
<p><b>Attitude</b></p> <p><i>social perception of people with disabilities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators or other participants stereotyping or discriminating (intentional or otherwise)</li> <li>• Facilitators or other participants rushing to judgment</li> <li>• Facilitators or other participants making assumptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite stakeholders to tell you what support they may need (<i>Don't assume you already know!</i>)</li> <li>• Ask, “What’s the best way I can help you?”</li> <li>• Ask before touching / moving anyone’s adaptive equipment</li> <li>• Speak directly to the stakeholder, not their companion, aide or interpreter</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mobility</b></p> <p><i>physical obstacles that prevent or block movement or access</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue features steps, platforms, or furniture placement that restricts movement around a space</li> <li>• Venue has counters or displays that cannot be reached / visible to someone in a wheelchair</li> <li>• Venue lacks available seating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When speaking to someone seated or in a wheelchair, be seated to be eye-level with them</li> <li>• Offer seating options</li> <li>• Allow aisles and pathways that are at least 36” to accommodate stakeholders using adaptive equipment</li> </ul>

TYPE OF BARRIER	EXAMPLES OF BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION	BEST PRACTICES
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <p><i>related to hearing, speaking, visual, reading, writing, and processing abilities</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitators fail to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>braille or assistive technology</li> <li>sound amplification</li> <li>large print/ readable font text</li> <li>captioning or ASL interpretation</li> </ul> </li> <li>Facilitators present rapid-fire questioning or long, multi-step instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have transcriptions / closed captioning available for virtual engagements (see apps like Otter for support)</li> <li>Use a microphone for amplification, even when it seems unnecessary</li> <li>Ensure fonts and text are easy to read (refer to federal ADA guidelines)</li> <li>Provide verbal descriptions of visual images, slides, or chat box responses</li> <li>Ensure that virtual platforms are compatible with assistive technology, like screen readers</li> <li>Offer verbal and visual information</li> <li>Break instructions into short steps, move slowly, and repeat as needed</li> <li>Allow “wait time” of at least 7-10 seconds after asking a question to allow for processing time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social</b></p> <p><i>conditions that contribute to barriers</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information presented displays prejudices against people with disabilities</li> <li>Facilitation team and/or stakeholders lack representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the representation of your team</li> <li>Be intentional about inclusion of all voices in the room (in person or virtually)</li> </ul>

## ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

[ADA](#) | Information and technical assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

[ADA Requirements: Effective Communication](#) | Lays out guidelines, services, and provisions to make communication accessible to individuals with disabilities.

[ADA Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field](#) | Provides guidance on making outreach ventures accessible to people with disabilities

[American Foundation for the Blind \(AFB\) Accessworld](#) |

Resources to support a world with no limits for people who are Blind or visually impaired

[The Arc](#) | Promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes

[CAST's Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) | A framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn

TYPE OF BARRIER	EXAMPLES OF BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION	BEST PRACTICES
<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p><i>lack of acknowledgment of laws and regulations in place to protect the rights of people with disabilities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement planner and facilitator denies access to or benefits of events or services</li> <li>Engagement planner and facilitator fails to provide reasonable accommodations</li> <li>Engagement planner and facilitator is unfamiliar with existing laws and regulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Familiarize yourself and your team with the <a href="#">Americans with Disabilities Act</a> and the <a href="#">Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</a></li> <li>Offer accommodation opportunities on registration forms and engagement marketing materials</li> </ul>
<p><b>Programming</b></p> <p><i>limited delivery of public programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Event lacks accessible resources and equipment</li> <li>Engagement planner and facilitator places limited priority on accessibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize accessibility when you plan your engagement</li> <li>Offer a virtual option for engagement</li> <li>Carefully consider the time of day at which you are offering your program; offer multiple sessions, when possible</li> </ul>
<p><b>Transportation</b></p> <p><i>ability of all people to independently access sites</i></p>	<p>Event is held in a remote location, inaccessible by public transit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer a virtual option for engagement</li> <li>Be mindful of public access to locations when choosing a venue</li> </ul>

## ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES (continued)

[Disability Rights New York](#) | Provides free legal and advocacy services to individuals with disabilities.

[Federal Social Media Accessibility Toolkit Hackpad](#) | Provides guidelines for supporting accessibility through social media platforms.

[IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) | Offers resources and language to provide support and guidance to families and educators as they accommodate individuals with disabilities.

[National Association of Council on Developmental Disabilities](#) | Supports programs that promote self-determination, integration, and inclusion for all people in the United States with developmental disabilities.

[National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#) | Conducts and supports research in the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, taste, smell, voice, speech, and language.

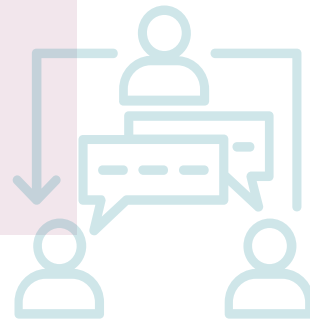
[Project Enable](#) | Professional development to build capacity for providing equitable access and services to students with disabilities, an under-served population



## BEST PRACTICES FOR ACCOMMODATING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Providing access, regardless, will benefit everyone. Learn more about how to eliminate barriers with [Universal Design for Learning](#).

- Remember that not all disabilities are visible.
- Listen and be patient.
- After offering, wait for acceptance
- Do not be afraid to ask questions if you are not sure about something.



### 4.4 CHECKLIST FOR ANTI-OPPRESSION, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

#### Barriers to participation and power dynamics

- Have we developed an outreach plan that reaches all the appropriate audiences?
- Have we ensured that the engagement serves the community and that it is worth their valuable time? Are there opportunities for them to be part of decision-making, or are they offering insights with no return?
- Are we the best people to lead the engagement? For example, a majority white and English-speaking team could partner with a Chinese community group to lead an engagement in a community of immigrants.

#### Digital and internet access barriers

- Have we identified and addressed barriers to participation?
- Does our outreach plan explicitly include and engage an equitable audience?
- Are we meeting people where they are?

#### Disability barriers

- Have we researched the needs in our community?
- Have we identified and addressed barriers to participation?
- Have we created space for stakeholders to guide us through their necessary accommodations before and during the engagement?

## SOURCES

Aorta. [Anti-Oppression Facilitation for Democratic Process Making Meetings Awesome for Everyone](#).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Advancing Health Equity](#).

Coalition of Communities of Color. [Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity](#).

Collective Impact Forum. [Collaborating to See All Constituents Reach Their Full Potential](#).

CTSA. [Principles of Community Engagement](#).

Minnesota Dept. of Health. [Community Engagement to Advance Health Equity: Strategies and Tips](#).

New York Department of Health. [Disability and Health in New York State](#).

Seattle Office for Civil Rights. [Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#).

University of Michigan. ["Check Yourself" Community Engagement Checklist](#).



2021 | Version 2.0

**TYTHEdesign provides social impact strategies that help build the capacity of government, nonprofits, and foundations to foster healthy communities and resilient cities.**

Our problem-solving approach draws on human-centered design: we provide insights and services that strengthen our partners in the social sector to be equitable, responsive, and innovative. With over 10 years of experience, we have led engagements and projects that intersect with community development, library innovation, education, workforce development, affordable housing, re-entry planning, arts and culture, and more.

No matter the project, the needs of direct stakeholders are at the core of our process: we ensure that many voices and perspectives are represented in civic dialogue, depicted in social services, and are included in decision-making that impacts them most.

TYTHEdesign is a certified Women-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) based in New York City.

See more at [tythe-design.com](https://tythe-design.com) | Keep in Touch: [info@tythe-design.com](mailto:info@tythe-design.com)

**TYTHE**  
design